

Chapter 4

Conclusion

The mission of the modern economy is to create conditions which enable people to develop their individuality in accordance with their wishes and abilities, while at the same time enabling them, despite all their differences, to live together. A system of groups is not some secondary element of one's lifestyle, but a fundamental means of enabling each person to realise himself in a circle of like-minded people, while simultaneously localising effects which might be negatively perceived outside the boundaries of that community. In this sense a group-based organisation of life is the most liberal means of balancing the interests of the individual and society. It provides an opportunity, amongst other things, of avoiding the uniformity in everyone and everything which is the direction in which we are nudged by the profit motive with its enthusiasm for standardising products. This is why so much attention has been paid in this book to the institutional development of a group system, which should move in three directions.

The first is ideological. Just as an individual may be unhappy mainly because he fails to see or does not appreciate his strengths, so it is damaging for a society to be at odds with its own nature and the overall direction in which it is developing. Many have a negative view of the New Economy and underestimate its humane potential. To understand the parameters within which change is occurring is already half the battle.

The second is as a method by which society may better understand itself. All the requisite elements are present to enable us to measure symbolic exchange quantitatively and analyse the dissemination of information. These investigations will make it possible to rescue humanitarian thought and practice from its present state of stagnation.

The third is practical. Everything is in place for the introduction of new standards of behaviour which will facilitate self-realisation and increase high-quality personal

time. This is what group filtering, the technology of information-based interaction between people, serves. It is based on reflecting on personal experience and providing straightforward access to the experience of others, primarily fellow group members. This tool enables a person to see for himself the connection between the efforts he makes and the results achieved. It enables him to manage change (including change in himself) at a fundamentally different level. Modern man cannot be said to be averse to self-observation and self-analysis. Rather, he often wallows in introspection. This kind of self-contemplation is, however, not all that is needed for the valid feedback which underlies any purposeful development, including personal development. A link showing efforts input and resultant output is always provided in professional and economic activity but almost never when it is 'only' a matter of oneself. This blind spot is so customary that people are not aware of or disquieted by it. In the past the snag was that documentation and self-monitoring entailed high psychological and time costs. These were tedious occupations which required pedantry on an almost perverse scale. The keeping of diaries, in particular, was not for everyone. Automated group filtering has made the process easy and widely available.

Already in the period of Web 2.0, documented self-observation with varying degrees of detail became an everyday habit. The transition to Web 3.0 introduces a qualitative change. Reflection acquires an ideal, digital form which makes it possible to resolve a great variety of urgent problems, from raising the efficiency of consumer choice to taking proper account of personal time. A minimum effort is called for, but no more than is involved in playing a game.

The transformation of useful but hitherto not widespread techniques into a routine is a revolutionary process, despite its apparent banality. To take an example from military history: Maurice, the son of William of Orange, created a major innovation almost out of nothing. He modernised the system for training soldiers, introducing a step-by-step refinement of fighting techniques. For example, the procedure for loading a musket was broken down into several dozen standardised movements. This might not seem particularly novel – the musket was still a musket – but such is the delight of social innovations which have stood the test of time. They appear simple, even banal, but yield astonishing results. The speed of fire and effectiveness of the Orange army increased several times over. Committed to training, the soldiers ceased to go out of their minds from boredom and became less likely to mutiny. They became used to drill and developed a sense of social solidarity which ensured coordinated action even under the extreme conditions of battle. These accompanying effects almost eclipsed the original reason for introducing them. Something similar is to be expected with collaborative filtering.

High achievement is half a matter of firmly establishing routines, whether in sport, education, creativity or elsewhere. If people systematically register the quality of their inner time, that too will improve before our eyes.

The observation has been made on more than one occasion that the increase in idleness in materially prosperous countries and social strata makes the problem of finding something to do extremely urgent. A way needs to be found of engaging human activity, as far as possible non-productively, so that no one loses their job

and as little damage is done as possible. One of the most promising approaches has been to redirect concern to the matter of personal time. If we devote the same amount of time to this as we currently do to worrying about our health, a vast realm of activity will open up, complete with its own laws and prospects.

One possible anxiety needs to be dealt with straight away. Collaborative filtering increases society's economic efficiency, reduces costs of the traditional scheme of distribution, and thereby abolishes a certain number of jobs. This flatly contradicts the New Economy's mission of ensuring universal busyness. Economising on social costs could indeed have negative consequences if there were not a large number of niches waiting to take up the slack. The New Economy with its production and supplying of social games provides a global space able to absorb any amount of human energy. Since these games matter, it is important to further develop their rules. Automating the thinking about quality time and people collaborating in the processing of information are serious improvements to the rules and make the game more rigorous, complex and interesting.

It is important not to regard rules and institutions as something static, unchallengeable and set in aspic. Rules can and must be renewed, and so must the human beings governed by them. People, as we know from history, are infinitely plastic and responsive to external motivation. Within living memory they have shown their best qualities, and there have been other occasions when they sank to a subhuman level. A person with his values and habits is not something unchanging. He is shaped by the circumstances in which he lives, including standards and values inherited from the past. There is an academic debate about which should have primacy, the individual or social institutions. Which of these leads and which is led is decided through action. To some extent, the rules can be influenced directly, but the individual only by means of new rules. Changes may begin with a recognition of new values, for example the value of personal time. This is something the collaborative system with its toolbox for registering and reflecting the quality of time facilitates. Before you know it there will be a move to new rules and standards.

To conclude, let us point out a drawback associated with the transition to second (gratuity) money. The innovation has plenty of risks which cannot be fully anticipated while standing on the riverbank. Today people complain about the excessive power of money and the undervaluation of culture, but what if the situation is reversed? With the coming of second money this is entirely possible. If up till now symbolic rivalry between people has been largely covert, when it becomes overt today's capitalist games may seem harmless by comparison. Symbolic domination, quantified and publicly displayed, is a far more powerful irritant than mere material inequality. It is more difficult to resign yourself to the fact that somebody else is cleverer or more talented than you, than to the fact that they are wealthier. This effect is muted by the fact that symbolic capital or talent varies both in accordance with heredity and with the sectors in which it is applied. At least, thanks to the group system, people will not be forced to compete on someone else's territory under rules they are not comfortable with.

People assess economic inequality and tension in a society by the difference in income between the haves and have-nots. The comparison tends to be made

between the income of the top 10% and the bottom 10% of the social scale. When some time in the future that gulf is measured in terms of symbolic capital, it will become glaringly obvious how great the danger is. Let us hope that the emergence of markets of personal time will do more good than bad. Society is capable of adapting to such challenges, as to all the other difficulties which only stimulate its development. It will be able to divide itself without undue friction into those who are players in the game and the rest who are not. The new group economy will see to that. Thanks to its contribution the symbolic field is constantly expanding and becoming better ordered, so that anybody who wants to find a place in it, can.

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